

Bible Study # 40  
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### The Gospels and Acts Series—Acts 1—9

This evening we are continuing in our survey series. We finished up the Gospels last Bible study and we **are continuing into the book of Acts**. The book of Acts is a direct continuation of the Gospels. It was originally written as a continuation of Luke's Gospel. In fact, *Luke and Acts really could almost be viewed as two volumes of one work*.

Luke 1:3, you might note, "it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus." Luke addresses his book to an individual by the name of Theophilus. It was a style of writing that was common in the Greek world when addressing a patron. Luke was written to give a detailed story of the things that Jesus taught and did. He addresses it to Theophilus.

Acts 1:1-3, note, "The former account [KJV, "treatise"] have I made, O Theophilus of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

Now the former account (treatise) is the book of Luke. Here you have, in effect, two volumes of the same work. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke that told the story of Jesus and what He did. It gave the account of His life and ministry from the beginning and continuing until the crucifixion and the resurrection. Then in the Acts of the apostles (the book of the actions of the apostles of Jesus), the story continued. Luke picks up the story in Acts exactly where he left off in the book of Luke. He picks it up with Christ's ascension into heaven and then comes forward with the story of what happened. So the two books go together to tell what Jesus did and said in His human ministry and then the continuation of His ministry.

Christ's ministry is still going on through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church that Jesus built is functioning to do His work. He came to do the will of the Father. He left behind His disciples and went to the Father in heaven; He

empowered them through the Holy Spirit to do the work that He had begun. So we have the continuation here in the book of Acts.

I think I mentioned before that the original canonization of the New Testament, basically 22 books by the Apostle Peter, was in about 67 A.D. There remained one final canonization, one final adding of Scripture which was by the Apostle John 30 years later. John added in his own five books. The 22 that Peter codified would have corresponded to the 22 that the Jews reckoned in the Old Testament. In that original reckoning, the Gospels would have been Matthew, Mark, Luke, and then Acts would have come next. Luke and Acts would have been together and read as two volumes of one work—one picked up the story where the other one left off. It's kind of like going through Samuel and Kings or something of that sort. There is a break and then you pick it right up.

John, about 30 years later, gave us the New Testament in the form that the Greeks have preserved it. He added in at that point his own five books: the Gospel of John, the epistles of I, II, III John and the book of Revelation. This was the final capstone of God's revelation to mankind that was to be preserved in Scripture. Of course, the only logical place for the Gospel of John is with the four Gospels. It was the last written. It did not follow exactly the story of the other three. The other three are much more similar than John. There wasn't any point in John writing something that was going to simply rehash what the others had already told from several different standpoints. John focused on the information that needed attention.

By the end of the first century, it was apparent that there were things that needed to be focused on, details that needed attention that the others had not seen a need of at an earlier time when they had written. John's Gospel comes in at the end of the Gospels and it is "sandwiched" between Luke and Acts. Sometimes we don't stop to think about it; we don't realize the extent to which there is a story flow that comes right on over into the book of Acts. Acts is a continuation of the Gospels. It is an integral link in the New Testament. Acts picks up the story where Luke leaves off in his Gospel account.

*One of the main purposes of the book of Acts is to show the continuity of the ministry of Jesus Christ through the work of the ministry of the early Church. The ministry of Jesus Christ did not end with His ascension into heaven. Christ*

did not go into retirement. There was a work to be done.

Luke, of course, begins Acts with the ascension of Christ from the Mount of Olives and the role of the 12 apostles there in Jerusalem. We will note that the narrative begins to narrow its focus. We find that Peter and John are the ones that are primarily focused on for the first 12 chapters. Others are mentioned somewhat incidentally. The rest of the 12 apostles pretty much drop from view and are just incidentally mentioned. *The attention of the first 12 chapters of Acts is primarily on what Peter and John were doing.*

Beginning with chapter 13 to the conclusion of the book, the focus switches from Peter and John to Paul. James, the brother of Jesus, was not one of the twelve, but he was certainly one that occupied that office and played a very major role presiding at the Jerusalem Church throughout his lifetime. He appears off and on throughout the book as a major figure. He is the one there in Jerusalem.

We note here the focus in Acts. Have you ever wondered why the book of Acts ceases to focus on the 12 apostles after Acts 12? After Acts 12, it concentrates primarily on the Apostle Paul. One of the reasons is that after Acts 12, the 12 apostles drop from view—they left the area of Judea. Christ had given them a specific commandment. Their primary commission was not to the Gentile nations. They were told by Jesus to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6). That's where the twelve went.

Paul, on the other hand, had as the primary focus of his mission to preach in the Gentile world throughout the Mediterranean area. It was not God's purpose that the location of the lost sheep of the house of Israel should be made clear back at that time. It was a part of God's purpose to allow the identity of Israel to be lost from view. And because that was God's purpose, He did allow the identity of Israel to be lost from view. The attention was not focused on where they went and what they did because if it did, we would have the story of the travels to Britain and to areas of France. Perhaps some of them went in the area of Scythia and Northern India where certain of the tribes were and later migrated up into Northern Europe. Since where they went would be very clearly identified, we change focus. Certain ones drop from view. It was not God's point to preserve all of those details at that time and in that way.

There is another reason for focusing in on Paul's ministry. The latter part of the book of Acts gives

us the details of Paul's ministry. It provides for us the background of Paul's epistles. Paul's epistles make up the backbone of much of the New Testament. Paul wrote 14 books. They are the most detailed explanation of the teachings of the New Testament Church on various doctrinal subjects. Paul addresses any number of things. Yet we could not really understand what Paul had to say if we weren't provided some of the background for his epistles. To whom was he writing? What were the circumstances? What were the situations? Luke gives us a background from which we can begin to understand more clearly some of the things that Paul had to say.

Another thing we note, as we go through the book of Acts, particularly in the first few chapters, there is a heavy emphasis on the miracles that God wrought through and on behalf of the early New Testament Church. We have in Acts 2 the miracle of languages on Pentecost. In chapter 3, we have the healing of the lame man. In chapter 5, we have God's punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. We have the account even of people being healed by just Peter's shadow passing over them. We have an angelic deliverance of the apostles from prison.

These things all serve to illustrate the dramatic way in which God made known to all in Jerusalem that He had taken the Kingdom from the Pharisees and Sadducees and given it to a people bearing the fruits of it (Matthew 21:43).

In Matthew 21:43, Jesus had told the Pharisees that the Kingdom was going to be taken from them. He indicted them for the way in which they misused their authority. He told the people that the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2-3). 'All they bid you do and observe, but don't follow their example.' He began to indict them. But earlier, He had told the Pharisees that the Kingdom, the authority, the government of God was going to be taken from them and it was going to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Acts 2 makes that transition plain. God made it plain in a very dramatic way, to all in Jerusalem who were interested in looking, through whom He was working. God never leaves His people in the dark. If God makes a transition, God will make it plain. God will make it apparent through whom He is working. He doesn't leave His people in a quandary where you cannot tell and you don't know. This was the case here.

Go back and read Mr. Herbert Armstrong's autobiography of the period during which this era of the work, the Philadelphia era, came into

existence. When you read the early period of his ministry in the 1930s, God made it very apparent to the Church at that time and to all who had the wit to see what was the live branch of the Church that was bearing fruit—through whom God was working—and what were the dead branches comprising the Sardis era.

It was very apparent because of the miracles and because of the works. Some of the most dramatic miracles and works that God accomplished in this era were done back in that period of the 1930s. It was back in time when there was a transition being made from one era to the next. It was made apparent to all with the wit to see what part of the tree was dead and what part had life and was bearing fruit. When God makes a transition that way, He makes it apparent. He never leaves His people in a quandary.

We have a dramatic focus on this kind of thing in the early part of the book of Acts. Then we will note, as we go through the book of Acts, that this dramatic upsurge of public miracles at the beginning begins to gradually fade somewhat as the Church became established. God had demonstrated where He was truly working.

We will note, this evening, that there was a time when the apostles were put in jail, and the jailers hardly got back to town before God sent an angel and brought them right out (Acts 5:18-19). You had dramatic interventions in that way. By the time we get to the end of the book of Acts, Paul had been put in jail and had stayed there for years. It was not that God began to run low on miracle-working power. It was a matter that God was working to accomplish His purpose—God’s purpose in our lives.

At an earlier period in Paul’s life or Peter’s life or some of these others, God had a job for them to do. He wanted them out where they could travel, where they could speak, where they could do certain things of that nature. If a man sought to stop it by putting them in jail, God just simply sent an angel to solve that problem right away. Paul was still just as anxious to get out, but later on there came a period in Paul’s life where he had reached another phase of his ministry. He wound up languishing in one place for a long time. He had a lot of time to sit and think. Some of the most important contributions that he wrote for the New Testament were composed at that time. You see, he was in a different phase of his ministry, not because he chose it, but because God, who had an overview, knew what was most important for Paul to do at the time.

We have to understand that God may intervene in our lives in one way at one point in our life and then in another point in our life, He may choose to deal in another way. What is important is that we are close to God and we can look to Him. As we look to Him and let God rule in our lives, there may be different things that are more important for us at different times in our life. We may not know what those are.

We will also note as we go through the book of Acts, in chapters 8 and 9, we are given our introduction to important figures in the early history of the Church. We are introduced to Saul, the persecutor, better known as Paul the apostle. We are also introduced to Simon the Sorcerer, known in history as Simon Magus. He was a Samaritan who played a very important role in Church history. We will note some of that as we go through.

We saw that Acts is a continuation of what Luke had written previously. We might note that here again.

Acts 1:1-3, “The former account I made [the Gospel of Luke], O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” Note here what Jesus preached.

In the beginning of Christ’s ministry, He started out preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Mark 1:1, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Verse 14, “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.”

Acts 1:3, “...being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.”

In the book of Acts, we find the conclusion of Christ’s ministry—after His crucifixion, His resurrection and immediately prior to His ascension into heaven. What was He teaching the apostles during these 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension? He was teaching them things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Jesus started out preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and He ended up preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. So we note in the beginning of the book of Acts, at the

beginning of the history of the New Testament Church, Jesus was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

What do we find Paul preaching at the end of his ministry?

Acts 28:30-31, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” The book of Acts ends up by saying Paul was preaching the Kingdom of God.

Jesus came proclaiming a message, the message of the Good News about God’s coming government. He preached that all through His human ministry. He continued to lay stress on it to the apostles after His crucifixion and resurrection, and we find it preached throughout the book of Acts. When we come to the end of the book of Acts, we find the last thing we have recorded is Paul was still preaching the Kingdom of God. It’s very apparent, when we look from a biblical standpoint, that the message that Jesus brought was not simply a message about the person of Christ. It is the message that Jesus Himself brought and preached. It’s the good news Jesus proclaimed which is the good news of the Kingdom of God. The apostles understood that because notice the last question they asked Him.

Acts 1:6, “Therefore when they came together and they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord will You at this time restore again the Kingdom of Israel?’” He had been talking about a literal kingdom, a literal government. He talked about it all through His ministry. He talked about it here after His resurrection. So they asked a logical question, ‘Well, Lord, is now the time? You’ve gone through all of this. You’ve been resurrected from the dead. Are You, at this time, going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?’ They kept expecting the establishment of the Kingdom.

Verse 7, “And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.’” It was not God’s purpose that they, at that time, should fully perceive those things in terms of more clearly understanding God’s time plan.

We find some of that later on into the New Testament period. We find Peter mentioning in II Peter 3:8, God’s 7,000-year plan: comparing the days of the week with 1,000-year time periods. Peter gives a little bit of insight.

John makes it plainer in Revelation 20:4-5 as he gives the capstone and makes it clear for the first time. John defines the length of time that the Kingdom of God is going to rule in the days of the Messiah. It will last for 1,000 years. We talk about the Millennium so much that, many times, we don’t stop to realize that the only place the length of the Messiah’s reign is clearly defined is in the book of Revelation.

If you didn’t have the book of Revelation, you couldn’t prove that it’s 1,000 years. You don’t find that in the book of Isaiah or in the book of Daniel. You find prophecies of the Messiah’s coming and the Kingdom of God, but there’s no place where it says that it will be 1,000 years. It says so in Revelation. He will reign for 1,000 years. Revelation is progressive. Some of these things were made clearer and clearer as time went on.

Christ had a job for them to do. It was not something that they needed to fully understand at the time. Christ didn’t tell them “yes” or “no.” He just said that the Father has reserved certain things for Himself. God has a time plan. That time plan is seasonal in nature. The times and the seasons the Father has put in His own power. God has a time plan that is seasonal. We picture it through the seasonal observance of God’s Festivals. God knows what He is doing. God is right on schedule.

Christ gave them instructions. They were gathered there and were in anticipation of the establishment of the Kingdom because Jesus had talked of it so much. He appeared to them and dealt with them from time to time over this period of 40 days beginning with the Wave Sheaf Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread (when He first manifested Himself to them) and then for 40 days—a number for trial and testing.

Acts 1:4, “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father.” Jesus told them that they should not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise of the Father.

Verses 8-10, “‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He has spoken these things, while they watched He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up....” He told them, ‘At this time you have a job to do, but

you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses unto Me.’ When He had spoken these things, He ascended to heaven. They watched Him as He ascended up from the Mount of Olives and out of their sight.

Jesus gave them a job to do, but He stressed to them, ‘Don’t go out and try to do it on your own. You need the promise that the Father has made. You need the fulfillment of the Father’s promise. You need to be endued with power from on high.’ They didn’t know exactly when they were going to get that power. He told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait.

We find out when they did.

Acts 2:1, “Now when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” They were there to observe God’s holy day.

Verse 2, “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.” That power came upon them suddenly.

This was ten days after Christ’s ascension. They didn’t know it would be ten days; they didn’t fully realize it. They may have wondered if that was going to be it, but Christ didn’t tell them to go back and wait ten days. He said to go and wait until it happens. That’s always a difficult thing for us to do. We don’t like to wait, particularly when it’s open ended. We like to know when. That was the last thing they asked Him, ‘When are You going to do all this stuff You have been talking about?’

That’s probably the question you and I would have asked. When? Isn’t that the question we ask now? When? When? When do you think? Christ made it plain what the concern needed to be. The concern was doing and accomplishing the job that God had given to be done. But that job could not be done and accomplished on the basis of human skill and human power. It’s not just human wherewithal. There was a need for the power of God to make possible the accomplishment of the job God had given them to do.

That is a very important lesson for all of us to realize. No matter what talents, no matter what skills, no matter what things are available to us to accomplish God’s work, the most important tool is not human skill. The most important tool we have in accomplishing God’s work is not the printing press. It’s not the computer, the automobile or the airplane. It’s not the radio; it’s not television. *The most important factor in*

*accomplishing God’s work is the Spirit of God!*

That is the most crucial factor in the accomplishment of God’s work—not some physical device or tool. Those things are well and good and they certainly have their place. God has provided that those tools are available to us, but the crucial ingredient is the power of God’s Spirit.

Acts 1:9, they stood there and watched Him as He ascended. They stood there staring and “gawking,” as would be the case. Just imagine as He began to rise and finally got so high the clouds obscured Him.

Verses 10-11, they just stood there with their mouths open and their eyes looking toward heaven. Finally, a couple of angels appeared and said, ‘You men of Galilee, what are you looking up into the heavens for? What are you staring at? This same Jesus whom you’ve seen going up is going to come back, just like He said. He will come back in the same manner as He left.’

Verses 12-14, then they went to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. They came to an upper room—evidently an apartment or place they had used—where the apostles were residing. They were staying in Jerusalem. The group continued in one accord in prayer and supplication, seeking to understand and grasp the full impact of what was going on and what God wanted them to do. We find, in verse 15, there were 120 disciples altogether. It says the number of names together were about 120.

By the way, this is a digression, but I would call your attention to it. Let me show you a good example of how a verse can be taken out of context. What I am going to tell you is literally true. You remember the story of Galileo and the telescope? Galileo discovered and taught that the earth was not the center of the universe, but rather it revolved around the sun. Feticus came up with the idea, but Galileo proved it with his telescope and promulgated that.

Well, this created a problem for Galileo. He got in trouble with the Pope who already had infallibility and had proclaimed that the earth was the center of things and everything revolved around it. So there was a cardinal at the Pope’s behest who wrote a book as a counterblast to Galileo. Of course, Galileo was threatened with ex-communication and everything else. He was dragged up there and threatened with worse than that. He was threatened with dire physical harm if he didn’t “see the light.” It struck me as funny, as far as how a verse can be taken out of context. The Vatican quoted this verse in this particular

papal bull to prove that people shouldn't be looking in telescopes. They quoted a portion of Acts 1:11, "...Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?..." "You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into the heavens?" – That was the only part of the verse that they quoted to prove that the Bible said you shouldn't be looking up into telescopes. You've heard people say you can prove anything from the Bible. You really can't prove "anything" from the Bible if you take the Bible for what it says. If you lift things out of context, take a word here and a word there and stick it all together, well, there is no telling what you would come up with. But that's not an honest use of the Bible.

We note here in the end of Acts 1, Peter who is the leader of the twelve—we notice that all through the Gospel accounts—stood up and addressed the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle being chosen (vv. 15-20). Twelve, of course, is the number of organized beginnings. The nation of Israel began with 12 patriarchs, and the Church clearly needed to begin with 12 apostles, 12 witnesses. In addition to being apostles, they were the foundation of the New Testament Church (Ephesians 2:20). They were to be eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ and His ministry through His resurrection.

Verse 22, they concluded that whoever was chosen to take Judas' place should be one who had been in the group of disciples from the time of John's baptism on up. It needed to be someone who had association with Jesus throughout the entirety of His ministry. The twelve were not the only disciples. Disciple and apostle are not interchangeable. "Disciple" simply means "learner."

In Luke 10:1, you read one of the places in the Gospels where Jesus ordained 70 and sent them out two by two. But the twelve were set aside as apostles. There was a need for this 12<sup>th</sup> one. Verse 23, they came up with two names that met the criteria. They did not know which of the two God had chosen, so they prayed.

Verses 24-26, "And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

You might note as you come through the rest of the book of Acts or in any other later portion of Scripture, that you will never find another

example of this term "cast their lots." You know what the difference was? It's what came next. What happened right after they had chosen the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle by lot? The Day of Pentecost came! And what happened on the Day of Pentecost? The Holy Spirit was given. Prior to that time, the Holy Spirit had not been given. After the Holy Spirit as given, there was no longer the need for casting lots, or something like that, to determine God's will. It was something that had been utilized from time to time in the Old Testament period and was utilized prior to the giving of God's Spirit.

Now in Acts 2, we find the Day of Pentecost came. We find this miraculous gift was given. It was a gift of speaking in foreign languages. That is made very, very apparent.

Acts 2:4, "And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance." Now what was the purpose of that?

Verses 5-11, "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.'"

Here were people of all different nationalities. They were Jews, but just as today, the Jews in the United States speak English, the Jews down in Mexico speak Spanish and the Jews in France speak French. The Jews normally are going to speak the language of the country where they reside. If they are Orthodox Jews and practice their religion, they may know a smattering of Hebrew, but very few Jews, other than those living in Israel, are really that fluent to where they can carry on a comfortable conversation in Hebrew. That was the case here. The average Jew of the time, who was a practicing Jew, knew certain phrases in Hebrew, but even the Scriptures were not commonly read in Hebrew outside of Palestine because most Jews were not that familiar with it. It was the language of

liturgy. They used certain words and certain expressions in religious terms.

Like some of you who had a Catholic background, years ago when the Mass was said in Latin, you may have been familiar with certain Latin phrases and religious terms that were commonly used, but you couldn't carry on a conversation in Latin. If the Pope had given a speech in Latin, you wouldn't have gotten a whole lot out of it. You may not have gotten much out of what the priest said, and that wasn't a whole lot. In other words, while persons may recognize certain words or expressions, they aren't fluent in the language.

With all of these people in Jerusalem, the only way they were going to clearly hear and understand what was said was in their own language. God performed a miracle. The miracle that God performed is quite a contrast to what the modern group that calls itself "Pentecostal" practices. To begin with, the first difference is that the apostles were keeping one of God's Holy Days. How many Pentecostals do you know who keep God's Holy Days? They don't keep God's Festivals. The apostles were doing that. They were gathered together to keep one of God's Festivals.

Acts 2:2, the next thing we note, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven..." This just came suddenly. It didn't say that Peter had been there working up the crowd for about an hour or two, playing all this music, getting all "jazzed up" and getting the crowd to answer him back—kind of working the crowd, building up and getting this excitement building.

Verse 3, "Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them."

I can remember years ago when old A.A. Allen (some of you may remember him) would get on the radio and ask, 'You want that baptism of fire?' Well, he didn't really want that baptism of fire if he had gotten it. When you understand what the baptism of fire is, it's not these tongues of fire. Being baptized is "plunged into." If you get that baptism of fire, you get immersed in fire—known as the lake of fire. So I don't think he really wanted that baptism of fire. The "Pentecostals" don't have cloven tongues of fire that appear. They are not speaking in languages that all of these people of every nationality understand. No, that is not the case.

Jimmy Swaggart says that he has the gift of tongues. He's gone all over the world preaching. When he goes to Japan, why doesn't he speak

Japanese if he has the gift of tongues? And in Mexico or South America, why doesn't he speak in Spanish? Why doesn't he speak in a language that somebody understands if he has the gift of tongues? He goes all over, but he needs somebody there who speaks that language because he doesn't have the gift of speaking the language that anybody understands.

The apostles didn't get up and work themselves up until they were just mouthing a bunch of "gobbledygook" that nobody understood. They were preaching a message. The apostles weren't just reciting certain catch phrases over and over again, just kind of building up speed and repetition. The apostles were preaching a message that proclaimed God's message. We see many, many differences that occurred right here.

Peter gave the main sermon. He really indicted them for what they had been a party to, and we find the question that they asked.

Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"

Verses 38-40, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.' And with many other words he testified and exhorted them..." He went on and explained a lot of things.

They believed the message Peter brought. Their response to their belief was, 'What shall we do? We believe you. We have heard the Gospel message and believe it—what shall we do?' Now Peter didn't tell them what some would have today: 'Well, you don't do anything. You just believe, brother; you don't do anything.' Peter didn't tell them that. Peter said, 'Repent. That's what you do! You turn around and go the other way. You've been going the devil's way; now turn around and go God's way. You need to change direction in your life.' That's what repentance is. It involves surrender to the will to God. Peter made it plain that there was something to do. There must be a change of direction, a surrender of our will.

Then he told them, on the basis of their faith and repentance, they should be baptized as an outward sign and they would receive the gift of God's Spirit. This was a promise that extended to them and also to their children. The obvious

implication is, of course, young children who were at home still being taught and trained by their parents. As a result of God's calling, these people have access to God and their children at home, who were growing up and being taught by them, also had access to God. They weren't cut off from God as the rest of the world was. They could have an understanding. Here was a promise that was available if they would reach out and take it. The promise extended to them and to their children. It also extended to any elsewhere that God would individually and specifically call.

We might note in Peter's sermon on Pentecost a couple of comments that would be quite at variance with what most modern-day Pentecostals would say. Peter was not preaching about going to heaven. In fact, he made it very plain that the saved don't go to heaven.

Acts 2:29, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried and his tomb is with us to this day."

Verse 34, "For David did not ascend into the heavens..." David has not gone to heaven? Now we are looking at ten days after Christ ascended to heaven. Christ was already in heaven. Everybody that was going to go to heaven had gone (John 3:13). Peter made plain that David wasn't up there. David hadn't ascended up to heaven. 'David is dead and buried and his grave is right over there. That's where David is; he's in the grave.' Quite a contrast to what most people believe.

Verse 41, we note also, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." There were about 3,000 individuals that day.

Verse 42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." There was doctrine taught. There was a way of life being taught. There was more to it than "believe." The individuals who were being converted and being baptized were individuals that continued steadfastly, resolutely, in the apostles' doctrine and in their fellowship. There was a closeness that was there. It says, "...in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." What is this "breaking of bread"? Some people think that means communion, 'Boy, just have communion everyday.' No, that's not true.

Verse 46, notice, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from

house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart."

"Breaking bread" simply means "having a meal together." They didn't just go down to the store and buy Wonder Bread enriched 12 ways. The wonder is that you eat it and live to tell the tale when you find out all the stuff it has in it. And Holsum Bread—which isn't. The bread that they ate was bread that was literally broken. It was similar to Pita bread. This was a very common style of bread that was utilized. It kind of doubled as something to put the other food in.

Bread was a common part of the meal. In certain parts of this country—certain parts of the South—inviting somebody to break bread with you simply meant to have a meal. A lot of time, the kind of bread people ate was cornbread or something of that sort. Sometimes that was what they literally did—they broke bread. Going back to the time when that was the way bread was divided up, it was broken into pieces.

There is nothing here that refers to them having communion every day, but 'with gladness they broke bread from house to house and ate their food with gladness.' They were spending time with one another. They were eating at one another's homes day by day.

One of the things to realize is that a large portion of the Church that began on the Day of Pentecost were Jews from elsewhere in the Roman Empire. There were Jews who didn't live in Jerusalem. Remember there were people from all over the Empire to observe Pentecost and this event occurred. Now, none of them wanted to go back home. There was excitement, exhilaration and the thrill of all of the things that was going on here. They didn't want to be separated from that, so they stayed. How did they stay? They had things in common. They shared; they moved in with someone. Those who were from out of town only had enough money to maybe have been there for a short period of time for the Festival. Once that was gone and if they were going to stay, they would have to stay with somebody. So they all pitched in. They shared. You see this type of thing.

Verse 47, "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved." God calls—people don't just join on their own initiative. God adds those whom He is calling.

Acts 3:1, "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer; the ninth hour." The "hour of prayer" was an expression

the Jews had that referred to the hours of the morning and evening sacrifice.

Verses 2-8, we have the healing of this lame man who had been there at the gate of the temple.

Verses 9-11, this created quite a stir because this individual had been there for an extended period of time. Thousands of people had seen him; when he was suddenly healed, it really created a stir. This also antagonized the religious leadership. Peter preached a very powerful sermon. He didn't pull any punches.

Acts 3:19-21, he told them, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

The restitution of all things is when God's Kingdom is going to be established.

In Acts 4:1-7, we find that the priests were all upset because of the people who believed the word.

Acts 4:8-12, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to the helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the "Stone, which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'" Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'" He didn't pull any punches in speaking to them.

Verse 12 makes it plain that there is only one way to salvation and that's through Jesus Christ.

As we continue, we see the power that God's message had. At this point, time had passed. There were people who were liquidating property and donating it to the Church to provide for all of the new converts who had stayed in Jerusalem.

In Acts 5, we read of a certain couple, Ananias and Sapphira who sold a possession and kept back part of it. Then they came and brought it to the apostles. This is a very dramatic event. We see Ananias being struck down dead and then Sapphira. Now notice here because some have had the idea the New Testament practiced

communism and didn't believe in private property. Well, that's not true. The Bible certainly teaches private property. One of the commandments teaches, "Thou shall not steal." This presupposes there is something to steal. If everything belongs to everybody, then how can you steal?

Acts 5:4, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Ananias and Sapphira didn't get in trouble because they didn't donate everything. They were in trouble because they lied to the Holy Spirit.

Notice what Peter told Ananias, "While it remained, was it not your own?" 'It was your property. You could do with it as you wished. It was yours; after you sold it, it was in your own power—it was still your money. You have conceived this thing in your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. You brought this part over here and said it was everything. You tried to aggrandize yourself as though you were sacrificing and giving everything; you weren't. It was your property; you didn't have to sell it at all. After you sold it, you could have given any part you wanted or you could have kept it all. It was your property. Nobody made you give any of it. The Church didn't say you had to sell your property. You "cooked up" a scheme really to lie to the Holy Spirit because that's whom you were lying to. You weren't simply lying to a man; you were lying to the Spirit of God.'

This account makes it plain that the property belonged to the member. It was not some New Testament enforcement of communism or something of that sort. People had all kinds of ideas that they dreamed up.

Verse 15, "so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them." Things had gotten to the point that even the shadow of Peter passing over them caused some people to be healed.

Verses 17-20, "Then the high priest rose up and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation [jealousy], and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.'" They threw them in jail.

Verse 21, “And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.” They said, ‘Okay, bring these guys in. We are going to have a trial.’ They sent the officers to the prison and they came back and said, ‘They’re gone. Where are they?’

Verse 25, they said, ‘Well, I think they are over there in the temple preaching. How did they get there?’ Things were moving with power. God made it very plain. Things continued right along.

Peter made it very plain that if we are confronted with a requirement of men to disobey God, what should we do?

Verse 29, “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than man.’” When there is a conflict between our duty to God and our duty to man, God comes first.

These things continued. There was increasing antagonism that the Jewish religious leadership had—even to the point that they sought to beat up Peter and some of the apostles (v. 40).

Verse 41, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” That was their attitude toward persecution. It was persecution for righteousness sake. There is nothing wonderful about being persecuted in and of itself; it’s only if we are persecuted for righteousness sake. Peter and the others were persecuted for righteousness sake.

Verse 42, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

In Acts 6, as the Church grew very rapidly, there arose a problem. One of the things we should learn is that even in the Church there can sometimes be misunderstandings, cases of hurt feelings or whatever. Here was a problem that arose.

Even though the entire Church consisted of Jews, some were Jews of the Diaspora called Grecians or Hellenists. Others were Hebrews or Jews of Judea. The Jews of Judea looked down on the Jews of the Diaspora because of their contact with the Gentiles. The Jews of the Diaspora tended to look down on the Jews of Judea as being pretty limited and narrow in scope and not really as educated and sophisticated. So there was a certain antagonism that was common in the

Jewish world. There were certain prejudices that people had.

It’s not uncommon for people to have prejudices. You can go all over the world and can find groups of people who look down on somebody else and have some prejudice against some other group. You can go to any continent or nation and can find some of these groups of people having all kinds of problems. You and I couldn’t tell them apart. They’ve been having rioting in Bulgaria of ethnic Bulgars and ethnic Turks. Now you line them up—chances are that most of us couldn’t tell which one was which. But they can tell. There have been thousands of ethnic Turks fleeing across the border in Bulgaria over into Turkey. You can go around the world; there is a certain antagonism between people. Satan always likes to play on this kind of thing and stir up people.

Here, even in the Church, there arose a problem because there were these two groups. Even though they were both Jews, there were certain cultural differences because of background. All of the leadership were Judeans. After a while some were kind of grumbling and saying, ‘I don’t think our widows are being paid enough attention to. I think some of those who are seeing after the widows are not paying enough attention to ours.’

Verse 2, the apostles finally got called in on this. They said, ‘We have more important things to do. We can’t stop doing the work of proclaiming the Gospel and get out there, count out exactly how much every widow is receiving and attend to waiting tables. If we spend all our time looking after all the physical details, we would never get around to doing what we have been commissioned to do.’ They recognized that while it was an important matter that needed to be tended to, it was not their primary job to get bogged down in the physical administration of things. They wouldn’t have the time to concentrate on the spiritual job. So they instituted an office in the Church—the office of Deacon.

Acts 6:3-6, “‘Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Pramenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set

before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

Men who had spiritual qualifications were appointed to a physical responsibility. They were men who could see after this matter and make sure that there was no inequity in how it was being carried out. They were ordained, set apart, for this office.

Verse 7, we find as a result of taking an action such as this, of becoming more highly organized and becoming more efficient, the number of the disciples multiplied. God blessed and multiplied what was going on as they properly handled their responsibilities.

Verses 8-10, we find that there was an individual, in fact one who had been ordained, a man by the name of Stephen who was a remarkable individual. The religious leaders were very antagonistic toward him because when they would bait him with questions, they simply could not withstand his answers. So they decided what they were going to do. They were going to arrest him and do something to get rid of him.

Verses 11-13, “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’ And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.’” They hired false witnesses.

In Acts 7, we find Stephen on trial. We find the sermon he gave. As they had him there, he gave a very powerful message to the court that was standing there. Then, we find that they killed him.

Acts 7:59-60, “And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” They threw stones and rocks at him and killed him. Notice Stephen’s attitude that he expressed right in the end was ‘forgive them.’ He was a remarkable man.

Here was the first death that occurred. About two years had passed since the Day of Pentecost. Things were growing and multiplying, but everybody was bunched up in Jerusalem. Nobody wanted to leave. Stephen’s death launched a persecution.

Acts 8:1, “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were

all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Saul is introduced here. He was a young man at the time. He stood there and watched this. We find that as a result of this persecution, there was a scattering. The disciples were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. So there was now a scattering. Everybody was all bunched up together, and then this tragic event occurred. It undoubtedly had a tremendous impact. People must have had their faith shaken. How could this be? How could God allow this to happen? Just a matter of months earlier, the apostles were thrown in jail and God sent an angel and delivered them. He could have sent an angel and delivered Stephen.

What was the result of this persecution? –The Church was scattered! Was that bad? –No, not in God’s overall plan. It caused the disciples to have to spread out, and now the message could spread. God is sometimes working out a plan that we don’t understand. We look at an event and we say, ‘Why would God let that happen?’ Well, God’s ways are not our ways. We don’t always know where God is going in terms of how He is going to accomplish His overall purpose.

Verse 5, “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” Philip went down to Samaria and began to speak to people.

Verses 9-10, “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’” We are introduced to a man by the name of Simon. He used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria. He was the religious leader of the Samaritans.

Verse 11, “And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.” He worked lying wonders. He was a sorcerer.

Verses 12-13, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” It seemed the whole city believed Philip’s teaching—what he was telling them about the Kingdom of God. They were baptized. Simon

himself was rather impressed and thought he had better get baptized, too—and he did.

Verse 14, “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.”

There is government in the Church; they found out there was something going on in Samaria. It took a little time for word to travel. They sent Peter and John to see what was going on.

Verses 15-17, “who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He [It] had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Philip had baptized them, but he had not laid hands on them for the receiving of the Spirit.

Verses 18-19, “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’” Simon noticed what was going on and he came to Peter and offered money.

Verses 20-23, “But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’”

Now I want you to notice that expression “part nor portion” (KJV, “lot”). ‘You have neither part nor lot in this matter.’ Hold your place here and turn back to Acts 1:25-26 where they had chosen Mathias, that he may “take part of this ministry and apostleship...and they cast their lots, and the lot fell upon Mathias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” The lot fell upon Mathias. That expression, “part nor portion,” has reference to an apostleship. Simon was trying to buy the office of apostle. Peter said, ‘You have neither part nor portion in this matter. You have no part of an apostleship. You were not chosen by lot, you have no part in this apostleship.’ He went on to emphasize that Simon was “bound by iniquity,” of lawlessness. He was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquities.” He was a slave of lawlessness. Peter saw through him. Simon was the religious leader of the Samaritans in Samaria.

What many don’t realize—just as the Jews had a Diaspora and were spread throughout the Roman

Empire—the Samaritans had also been scattered at an earlier time by Alexander the Great. There were sizable Samaritan communities in Alexandria, Egypt and Rome, Italy. It was the nucleus of Samaritans in these areas that gave heed to Simon.

We will note at a later time the role that Simon played in the beginning of a great false church that called itself “Christian.” In reality, it traces back not to the leadership of Simon Peter, but to the leadership of Simon the Magician. He was the “*pator*,” the Babylonian or Samaritan word for the “opener” of the old Babylonian Mystery religion that had come to Samaria. We are introduced to Simon in somewhat detail here in Acts 8 so that we might understand the background later on.

As we look through Acts 8, a little later, verses 27-40, we have the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. I might comment on that. From the time of King Solomon, many of the upper class leaders in Ethiopia practiced the religion of the Old Testament. For literally hundreds and hundreds of years, the ruling families and the upper classes of Ethiopia practiced the religion of the Old Testament, to the point that it was not uncommon that they were circumcised. That’s why an Ethiopian could come to the temple and go right in to the same court at the temple that any of the Jews could because they were circumcised. Right to this day, particularly among the leadership classes, the Ethiopians have continued to practice the religion of the Old Testament. It was not uncommon for them to travel to Jerusalem. It was obviously those who had the money and the wealth to do so.

Verse 27, this Ethiopian was a man of great authority. He was an Ethiopian that was there. In one sense he was the first Gentile baptized and, yet, is not considered such because he was in that sense a convert to Judaism first. He was not converted to Christianity directly from a Gentile pagan religion. He had undoubtedly, as many of the upper class in Ethiopia, practiced the religion of the Old Testament. He had gone to Jerusalem and was traveling back.

Verse 28, he was sitting there in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah.

Verses 31-35, Philip preached the Gospel to him from the book of Isaiah.

You know, the Old Testament is a guide to salvation. Peter preached his sermon in Acts 2 out of the Old Testament. Philip preached to the

Ethiopian eunuch out of the Old Testament. So it is made very plain.

In Acts 9, we are introduced in more detail to the Apostle Paul or the one who became the Apostle Paul in his conversion.

Verses 3-4, Saul, the persecutor, was struck down on the road to Damascus. You are familiar with the account.

I would call your attention to a three-fold commission God had in mind for him.

Acts 9:15, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine, to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” Those were the three parts of the commission that God gave to Paul.

But God, even in working with Paul, continued to work through the government of His Church.

Verses 8-12, God struck Paul blind, and he was blind for a period of three days. God sent Ananias (no relationship to the Ananias of Acts 5 who had been struck dead) to anoint him.

Verses 17-18, “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me, that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.”

Ananias anointed and laid hands on him; he was healed. He talked to him, counseled with him and baptized him. God does things in an orderly fashion through the government that He has established in His Church, even when He is going to work with someone in a unique manner.

Next time we will pick up the story with Paul. We will focus in on that in more detail next time.